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FLES--IN SEARCH OF DISCIPLINE AND CONTENT.

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THE LACK OF UNIFORMITY IN TEACHING PRACTICES, COURSE CONTENT, MATERIALS, AND TEACHER PREPARATION HAS HAMPERED ACHIEVEMENT IN FLES PROGRAMS AND PRODUCED MANY UNSTABLE PROGRAMS. THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR OBJECTIVES TO BE CLEARLY DEFINED AND CRITERIA TO BE DEVELOPED FOR JUDGING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SERIOUS FLES PROGRAMS. WITH PROPERLY SEQUENCED LINGUISTIC MATERIALS, EFFECTIVE METHODOLOGY, AND AN AWARENESS BY TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS OF THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT WHICH SHOULD BE EXPECTED OF THE STUDENTS, CONSIDERABLE IMPROVEMENT COULD BE MADE. RESEARCH IS NEEDED TO AID IN DETERMINING THE AMOUNT OF LANGUAGE TO BE TAUGHT, PRODUCING MATERIALS AND ACHIEVEMENT TESTS, IDENTIFYING METHODS TO BE USED, DESCRIBING TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, AND DELINEATING THE CONDITIONS THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY THE ADMINISTRATION. IN ADDITION, THE PROFESSION MUST INVESTIGATE WAYS OF TRAINING FUTURE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO ASSUME SOME OF THE FLES TEACHING TASK. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "THE DFL BULLETIN," VOLUME 6, NUMBER 3, MARCH 1967. (AM)

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FLES: IN SEARCH OF DISCIPLINE AND CONTENT

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What's What by Donald D. Walsh is published by the Modern Language Association. The catchy title of this invaluable 34-page booklet is explained by its subtitle: "A list of useful terms for the teacher of modern languages." On page eighteen of the third edition, the following entry is found:

> FLES: the initials of Foreign Language (in) Elementary Schools, so abbreviated by Kenneth Mildenberger in 1953 when he was planning the first MLA questionnaire on FL enrollments at this level. The term has gained wide usage and is usually now pronounced as a word to rhyme with "dress."

As we look at the teaching of foreign languages in elementary schools from the vantage point that 1967 offers us, we cannot but reflect that the term FLES, in addition to gaining wide usage, has also been widely misused and misunderstood. It is not common to find articles in our professional journals reporting disillusionment with FLES programs and decisions to drop FLES. However, as we read these articles and as we speak to colleagues about particular situations, we oftentimes experience the reaction: Why should such programs be called FLES programs?

The fact is that many so-called FLES programs do just about everything except teach authentic language efficiently and effectively. We would like to suggest that the meaning and interpretation of FLES both by members of the profession and by foreign language publishers reflect a greater amount of fantasy and wishful thinking than of research in the application of linguistics and psychology to the development of a "theory of instruction" that should be complementary to a "theory of learning." (These terms are used by Jerome Bruner in his introduction to *Revolution in Teaching: New Theory, Technology, and Curricula,* Bantam Books, New York, 1964.) It is none too early for the profession to concentrate on putting some real meaning into the handy label that Mildenberger presented us with in 1953.

The misuse and misunderstanding of FLES practices can easily be documented by visiting certain classrooms or by examining critically the materials used for teaching. Even more revealing is the fact that teachers often make up course content by using bits and pieces taken from various sets of materials. What goes on in FLES classrooms shows a lack of uniform standards and the need for a clear and concrete definition of objectives. FLES practices and pupils' achievement clearly indicate that teachers have not yet realized that foreign language instruction, in order to bear worthwhile results, must be cumulative; or else, if they agree with this principle, they do not know how to implement it effectively.

The objectives of FLES instruction must be defined in the light of psycholinguistic theory and without betraying common sense and basic principles of educational theory and practice. Objectives that fulfill these conditions could be known as "professional" objectives of FLES instruction, so that the adjective "professional" may help us keep their nature in focus while at the same time it differentiates these true objectives from the haphazard listings, notions or definitions that explicitly or implicitly form most of our present-day FLES practices.

Approaches and classroom activities in FLES programs encompass an alarmingly diversified list, and no truly "professional" objectives can be achieved under such conditions. The situation is not helped any by the fact that just about anyone is often allowed to become a FLES teacher. This state of affairs is the reason why definable and measurable objectives are achieved in only an infinitesimal number of FLES programs.

However much this may distress some people, we believe that a certain amount of uniformity is necessary with regard to teachers, materials, course content, methodology and general conditions that make possible an effective FLES program. And by an effective FLES program is meant one that offers concrete evidence that pupils have accomplished a measurable amount of the beginning of a sequential foreign language course. The primary objectives of a beginning foreign language course — regardless of whether the learners are eight years old or eighty — are the acquisition of the basic skills that ultimately lead to complete functional control of the foreign language with regard both to the reception and the production of oral or written messages. Limited insights into the nature and function of language are also needed at this stage by the learner in order to enable him to learn as efficiently as possible, and in order to ensure the transferability of the basic principles underlying the linguistic material that has been presented.

To be more specific, the basic skills referred to may be described as the ability to:

1. Discriminate between correct and incorrect sounds.
2. Prounce correctly.
3. Reproduce accurately a body of meaningful, memorized material.
4. Understand this material in recombined form.
5. Recognize certain structural markers when heard.
6. Manipulate certain structures.
7. Create new utterances by transfer of structural principles.
8. Read and spell correctly by reacting properly to sound-letter correspondences.
9. Read memorized and recombined material with good pronunciation and with complete control of lexical and structural meaning.
10. Write correctly within the limits of certain structures.

These are demanding objectives, and no compromises or half-baked accomplishments should be allowed. The achievement of such objectives must be made possible by the presentation and sequencing of the linguistic ma-

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terial — the essential role of the textbook writer and researcher in methodology — and by the manner of presentation and effective use of modern teaching techniques — the task of the teacher and ultimately of the master trainer of teachers.

With regard to insights into the nature and function of language — what, for short, we might call "linguistic knowledge" — the learner must be guided in discovering a limited amount of information concerning the functioning of the foreign language in both its oral and written forms. Naturally, this must be done through comparison and contrast with the native language. Only thus will the language learning experience go significantly beyond the mere ability to reproduce memorized material. Once the learner has been made aware of a linguistic fact, and once he has assigned to it its proper place in the linguistic system, he can then slowly free himself from the memorized material and take small steps in creating original, authentic utterances. The objectives of a beginning foreign language course should make provision for both practice and knowledge.

If the above objectives are accepted, then criteria based on them could conceivably be devised and used to distinguish between professional FLES programs and what might be termed "non-FLES" programs. Since our schools exercise to a large extent the privilege to determine what shall be taught, we certainly have no right to suggest that all "non-FLES" programs be abolished, provided that teachers, administrators, and taxpayers can justify them. (There is, however, available evidence that suggests that "non-FLES" programs have a way of fading out of existence.) On the other hand, all foreign language teachers who are striving to establish the much-needed standards and quality in their profession should strongly object to "non-FLES" programs being referred to as foreign language programs. The designation FLES should be reserved for the very small number of productive programs.

One of the urgent tasks facing the profession with regard to FLES is to clear up the vagueness regarding what should be taught, how it should be taught and by whom it should be taught. Specific research is needed to 1) determine the amount of a basic foreign language course that can be assimilated by elementary school pupils in a given number of contact hours; 2) produce materials that provide both practice and knowledge; 3) evaluate and describe the methods used; 4) produce FLES achievement tests that include speech production, listening comprehension, structure, reading and writing; 5) describe who is equipped to teach FLES and 6) state the conditions that administrators should provide. Once this information has been collected, it should be made available to the profession by means of articles, tape recordings, and films. Through all possible means, FLES teachers and administrators should be made aware of their responsibilities and of the amount of pupil achievement to be expected, as well as of its quality.

If the profession has produced more "non-FLES" programs than FLES programs, it has only itself to blame. In 1957, William Riley Parker, as director of the Foreign Language Program of the Modern Language Association, wrote, "I want to caution enthusiastic parents, administrators, and foreign language instructors that we shall defeat our purposes if we do not restrict the growth of this educational trend to the supply of adequately prepared teachers" ("Foreign Language in the Grades: A Caution," *The National Elementary Principal,* XXXVI, 5 [February 1957]; reprinted by the MLA as part of the FLES PACKET [revised March 1966]). In 1961, Nancy V. Alkonis and Mary A. Brophy visited FLES programs in sixty-two school systems, and they concluded that if the programs they visited were representative, then the "state of FLES in the United States needs a lot of improvement" ("A Survey of FLES Practices," *Reports of Surveys and Studies in the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages,* The Modern Language Association, p. 217).

Since we as a profession have been aware for some time of the weaknesses inherent in the FLES situation, we may well wonder what has been accomplished during the past few years with regard to FLES teacher training and the overall improvement of FLES programs. Shamefully little can be reported on FLES teacher training. Nine years have passed since Parker told us in the article just quoted that "the surest way of discrediting language instruction — causing the public to doubt its value and relevance — is to have it done by teachers who are not qualified." An examination of "Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages: An Exposition" (*The Modern Language Journal,* L, 6 [October 1966], available as a reprint from the MLA) clearly reveals that little has been written and even less has been accomplished.

Since 1959 a small number of NDEA Foreign Language Institutes has attempted to upgrade the quality of FLES teachers. The authors of this article have taught at some of these institutes, and in their estimation quite a large number of teachers come to the institutes with such deeply-ingrained, poor language habits that in the short period of six or eight weeks there simply is not enough time to rid them of their incorrect habits and to guide them in forming correct ones. Other attempts are being made to alleviate the teacher shortage by offering workshops, in-service training programs and methods courses. These professional efforts can be fully effective only with respect to teachers who possess complete or nearly complete control of the foreign language sound system as well as of the morphology and syntax needed to teach their FLES classes. These should be absolutely minimal requirements for a foreign language teacher at any level of instruction. But this is the crux of the matter. It does not take too many visits to foreign language classes at any level to realize that the profession has not yet succeeded in training teachers who can model accurately the sounds of the foreign language and who control effectively the structure of the language they teach. And if there are shockingly few teachers who pronounce well, it must be added that there are even fewer who know how to produce students who can pronounce well. The foreign language teacher must know how to perform and how to teach students how to perform. Learning how to perform takes a great deal of time and systematic, intensive work. The institutes, workshops, in-service training programs and methods courses cannot provide the time needed to do for FLES teachers what was not done for them in their high school and college courses. Finally, a native or native-like skill in speaking constitutes in itself no guarantee of superior performance by the pupils. It often happens that untrained native speakers are the least successful teachers of good pronunciation habits.

There are members of the profession who through ignorance or innate complacency believe that everything is just fine in FLES. It is not impossible to attend professional meetings

where the entire time is devoted to patting ourselves on the back for the fine job that we have done. It is high time for some of us to take off our rose-colored glasses, and it is our duty to the profession to fight against self-satisfaction, particularly when it is not based on realities. The profession, if it cares at all about FLES, must explore and establish means of training some of the future elementary school teachers so that they may assume real FLES teaching responsibilities. "We are indeed on the edge of a great period of revolution. But it would be a great pity if our zeal were too easily assuaged by partial victories. We do well to recall that most revolutions have been lost precisely because they did not go far enough" (Bruner, *op. cit.*, p. 7).

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